Counterpunch

A Report from the Capital

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The Last Plantation

Nunn's Staffers Run Amok at Senate Armed Services Committee

One advantage of losing a war is that defense hawks and profiteers tend to be purged from the body politic. In Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War brought ruin and humiliation for hardline elements, even if some are now being resuscitated by the reaction against free market "shock" therapy.

Meanwhile, in the United States, many of the most notorious Cold War scoundrels maintain their prestige and power. Henry Kissinger and Al Haig promote business opportunities in China and attack critics of Beijing's human rights record. Elliott Abrams, a chief architect of the Reagan administration's Central America policy, is a regular guest on the talk show circuit and has lobbied on behalf of anti-Aristide forces in Haiti. Oliver North may well become Virginia's newest senator in this year's election.

And in Washington, as securely entrenched in power as ever, sits one of the most gruesome byproducts of the Cold War: Sam Nunn. One day protecting the military from the taint of gay cadets, the next pushing for wartime-level defense budgets, Georgia's senior senator continues to cast a long shadow on U.S. foreign and military policy.

The base of Nunn's power is the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), which he has turned into a personal fiefdom since the Democrats regained control of the senate in 1986. The Committee's 14 professional staffers on the majority side-all white men except one—are a tight, secretive group of Nunn loyalists so right-wing that a congressional source calls the SASC "The Last Plantation." Unelected and overpaid, these rabid yahoos play an enormous role in defining military policy, influencing everything from budgets to strategy. "The Committee is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Pentagon," says a Defense Department source. "They have a vested interest in the cash cow."

The SASC's staff director is Arnold Punaro, a political and social Neanderthal who earns $125,000 per year to run the Committee while Nunn makes speeches and politicks. A marine reservist and faculty member at Georgetown University, one of Punaro's chief objectives is to steamroll the weaker and less hawkish House Armed Services Committee during the annual conference in which the Pentagon's budget is hammered out. Last year, Punaro whipped the staff into a frenzy with a "kick-some-butt" pep talk before sending his charges into battle against House foes.

Punaro's loves the Marines the way a dog loves a steak bone. In a December 1993 article in *Marine Corps Gazette*, he emotionally recalled past Corps "skill and bravery" in Vietnam, Korea, and Iwo Jima ("a pork-chop shaped island in the Pacific") before branding as traitors all who dare propose cutting Marine funding. "Today there are forces that would rip and tear at (the marines)," wrote Punaro. "These forces may be more dangerous than the frontal assault on the Corp's existence (during the Korean War) because they are subtle—not direct...and they are led by budget bureaucrats—not warriors."

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One, Two, Many C-17s

Senate Democrats Front for the Pentagon With "Reform" Legislation

In the last issue of ***Counter*punch**, we detailed the infamous story of the C-17 cargo plane, a worthless $700 million aircraft whose primary mission is enriching the Pentagon and its prime contractor, the McDonnell Douglas Corporation. A number of Senate Democrats—including such "reformers" as Jeff Bingaman (NM), Dale Bumpers (AK), Carl Levin (MI) and John Glenn (OH)—are currently hard at work to ensure that new C-17-style projects are developed in the years ahead.

Under the guise of "streamlining defense acquisition," these Democratic stalwarts are pushing legislation (contained in Senate Bill 1587) which, among many malevolent effects, will gut testing requirements for major weapons systems. Particularly sinister are clauses that seriously limit "live fire" testing and allow the Secretary of Defense to waive "operational" testing if it's deemed too expensive or impractical. This means that the Pentagon will routinely seek waivers for all systems it knows can't pass careful scrutiny.

While the Defense Department already manages to skirt most realistic testing, SB1587 will sanctify the shady practices now used to do so. "(Further undermining) testing requirements is urgent for the porkers," says a Pentagon source. "This legislation will increase abuses because it legalizes what they're already doing and removes the nagging doubt about whether they can get away with it."

If conducted properly, testing brings discipline to the acquisitions process by revealing whether the promises made by the technical community have any merit. Since those promises are generally either wild exaggerations or outright lies, the Pentagon and contractors routinely try to rig testing to conceal flaws. James Burton, a retired Air Force colonel who documents numerous acquisitions scandals in his new book, *The Pentagon Wars*, says the "reform" legislation "guarantees that weapons won't be tested seriously, which means they (the military) can promise anything. It shows that they aren't interested in finding out whether the stuff they're buying works, they're just interested in buying."

To understand how the SB1587's weakening of already flimsy testing statutes will invariably lead to future boondoggles, consider the history of:

- The $400 million Aegis high-tech radar system, which was designed to track and shoot down up to 200 incoming missiles at once. The Navy "tested" the Aegis in a meadow near Exit 4 of the New Jersey Turnpike, where it was charged with the difficult task of monitoring civilian air traffic over New York airports. In another set of tests, the Aegis performed brilliantly, shooting down ten of eleven drones. It was later revealed that the system's operators were informed in advance of the path and speed of the incoming targets. In 1988, in it's first time in combat after being installed on the USS Vincennes, the Aegis successfully bagged an Iranian Airbus with 290 civilians on board. Human and mechanical error led the crew to mistake the Airbus (length: 175 feet) for an F-14 (length: 62 feet), miscalculate its altitude by 4,000 feet and report that the civilian liner was descending in attack position when the plane was actually climbing.
- The Navy's Airborne Self Protection Jammer (ASPJ), a "cloaking device" for the F-18 designed to confuse enemy radar, was built despite serious problems during the testing phase. Officials said they would clear up difficulties at a later date, a mission they proved incapable of performing. The Navy now proposes building special racks to fit the useless ASPJs—which sit forlornly in a military warehouse—on the F-14, though there's no indication the device will work any better on that plane than it did on the F-18. "This program has cost $2 billion and gone on for 17 years," says a senate source. "So far, there's been no improvement over (the jamming systems) which previously existed."
- The overrated Maverick air-to-surface missile, used with less than 50 percent accuracy during the Gulf War, has heat-seeking infrared sensors which "lock on" target. Unfortunately, they are quite easily distracted. In one test during which a Maverick was supposed to be homing in on a tank, operators discovered that the missile had "locked on" a distant campfire where two soldiers were innocently cooking beans. Burton classifies the Maverick as "an excellent bean killer."

Sources say that two systems now in development are proceeding despite abysmal testing failures. The T-45 training jet was found to have an unfortunate tendency to go into a "tail-to-tail" spin, while the ASROC anti-submarine rocket has proved incapable of identifying and destroying a target from "beyond visual range," its entire raison d'etre. Instead, a helicopter must be stationed at a point along the ASROC's flight path—making it a sitting duck for enemy fire—to guide the missile to its target.

The "reform" legislation will also pave the way for increased computer simulated testing, a Pentagon favorite because its weapons always perform spectacularly under the bogus conditions that method allows. "Simulation is akin to masturbation," says a source. "The more you do it, the more it seems like the real thing."

The Clinton administration not only supports this cynical effort to "streamline" acquisitions, but has proposed even feebler testing legislation than that contained in SB1587. Furthermore, Clinton has yet to nominate a candidate for chief tester—the only presidential appointee on the Secretary of Defense's staff still unnamed.

"If a real threat to national security existed, the people behind this legislation would be charged with treason for endangering the safety of troops," says a DoD dissident. "This isn't reform, it's deform." •

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SASC, from p. 1

Thanks to Punaro's support, the Marines have fared far better than the other services in fending off enemy assaults on budget and personnel levels. While Army manpower was cut from 611,000 to 540,000 between 1992 and 1994, Marine Corps levels were barely touched, dropping from 185,000 to 177,000 during the same period. The Corps rewarded Punaro last December by elevating him to reserve Brigadier General, a most unusual promotion given his limited reserve activity. "It was a payoff to a person who has tremendous political clout and who pushes to maintain their budget," says an observer familiar with the case.

A ferocious social conservative, Punaro in private speaks ominously of the menace posed by "wide-eyed feminists" and "liberals," the latter being everyone to the left of Nunn. In regard to gays, Punaro once remarked, "We shouldn't just ban them (from military service), we should burn them."

Punaro's No. 2 man is David Lyles, who played a key role in rigging the SASC's hearings on gays in the military so as to ensure that President Clinton renege on his promise to lift the ban. Lyles spent weeks at the Norfolk Naval Base before the crucial May 10 hearing aboard the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy, during which 15 of 17 sailors testified that they favored maintaining the ban on gays.

Such overwhelmingly negative sentiment was entirely predictable, given that Lyles had carefully screened and selected the witnesses—who were plucked from a pool originally suggested by base commanders—and knew exactly what they would say. When senators toured the carrier and personnel spoke spontaneously, a surprising number said they saw no problem with lifting the ban. Nunn, who had promised that the hearings would be fair and balanced, said that proved he hadn't sought to stack the deck.

Lyles was exultant with the Norfolk farce, as was Punaro. The staff director gleefully predicted that the combination of Norfolk and testimony from Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf would be "a one-two punch" that would force the "folks at the White House [to] say 'uncle'."

Another malign influence at the SASC is general counsel Andy Effron, a key co-conspirator on the gay hearings. Effron pooh poohed the violent assaults against dozens of women at the Navy's 1991 Tailhook Association convention in Las Vegas, suggesting that rape is not a serious crime. A senate source says Effron's primary preoccupations as the Committee's lead attorney are "making sure that his neck isn't sticking out and getting his back patted by the Pentagon."

SASC staffer Rick DeBobes, a retired Navy captain and lawyer, previously served as legal and legislative counsel to former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. William Crowe. In that capacity DeBobes helped cook up the *Fogarty Report*, the Pentagon's cover-up of the USS Vincennes's 1988 downing of an Iranian Airbus with 290 civilians on board—a report *Newsweek* later called a "pastiche of omissions, half-truths and outright deceptions." At the SASC, DeBobes has pushed for the military to play an increased role in interdicting n rcotics, a role the Pentagon relishes as it offers a new justif ation for high levels of defense spending.

Maintaining the Pentagon's budget in the post-Cold War period is a job the entire SASC takes seriously. One ploy increasingly used is to shuffle money to the Defense Department for non-military activities, such as recent decisions to build a new Georgia-based Pentagon center to study military-related environmental pollution and to give the Army more than $200 million for breast cancer research. Nunn even talks of using the Pentagon as a sort of national Peace Corps, saying "there will be a much greater opportunity than in the past to use military assets and training to assist civilian efforts in critical domestic areas."

While technically employed by the U.S. government, SASC staffers are especially diligent in maintaining the money flow to defense contractors and military installations in Nunn's home state. Among the former, Lockheed receives special attention. The world's fifth largest weapons manufacturer, the company is comfortably surviving the post-Cold War period, posting an 11.3 percent return on equity for 1993.

Meanwhile, Georgia—which ranks fifth in the nation in terms of military compensation due to its large number of defense installations—has escaped virtually unscathed from the base closures that have decimated other states, most notably California. Georgia's position has been bolstered by Frank Norton, an old crony of Nunn's and Punaro's who joined the SASC staff in mid-1993. Norton met with local business and political leaders, and otherwise plotted strategy which helped preserve Ft. McPherson, Ft. Gillem, Warner Robins Air Force Base and the Marine Corps Logistics Center, the four major Georgia facilities thought to be vulnerable during last year's round of closures.

To seriously change defense policy would require not only challenging the Pentagon, but challenging Nunn and the SASC as well. New Democrat Clinton, who wanted to make the Georgia senator his defense secretary after Bobby Ray Inman withdrew his nomination, has neither the political will nor the courage to do so. As an unnamed administration official recently told *The New York Times*, "No Democratic foreign policy is going to get very far, particularly one with a military aspect to it, unless it's blessed by Sam Nunn." •

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THE CIA AND THE PROBLEM OF IDENTITY

by Alexander Cockburn

Like other agencies of the U.S. government back in the 1950s the CIA saw rich promise in the idea of injecting radioactive materials into humans. But whereas documents recently released by the Department of Energy show radioactivated recipients usually to have been either unwitting (schoolchildren told they were getting "vitamin supplements") or in unfortunate circumstances (lifers in prison, terminally ill patients), the Agency planned to inject radioactive matter into the bodies of its own agents, or personnel.

The CIA took the prudent course of destroying almost all its files on biological and chemical research back in 1973, on the orders of Richard Helms. The Agency now says piously it can find no record of such activities.

But researchers in the 1970s managed to unearth some bizarre and revealing documents, including one—never to my knowledge published—on "Establishing and substantiating the 'bona fides' of agent and/or staff personnel through techniques and methods other than interrogation."

The three-page *Memorandum for the Record*, with signatory deleted, shows the CIA to have been deeply influenced by the Fifties SF obsession with alien invaders of the human form assuming the exact lineaments of the host. Of course the SF writers were in their turn reacting to cold war obsessions about the Enemy Within, fostered by propagandists backed by the CIA.

From the days of Ian Fleming, the creator of James Bond who wrote the mission statement for the CIA and later suggested to the Kennedy brothers ways to poison Castro, show business and secret intelligence have always cross-fertilized each other vigorously.

The CIA officer authoring the memorandum opens with a discussion of the methodological problems caused by the need for secrecy—"problems which are so tough as to be almost insolvable and in their unsolved state are a perpetual source of inefficiency." The author correctly pointed out that methodological obsession with secrecy, if unchecked, "destroys its own reason for existence."

"How can the 'bona fides' of an agent or staff individual be established?" the author asks. "Today, because of rapid changes and reassignments of our overseas case officers and the continuing operation of agents...[words deleted by CIA censor] for long periods of time, the paramount question arises upon the exfiltration of the agent(s). Is the agent 'bona fide'; is he the same person we started with?"

The deleted words clearly refer to an agent planted in hostile territory or under deep cover. Hence the CIA's nightmare. Is our agent really and truly the genuine article, or some clone fixed up by the plastic surgeons of the KGB?

The CIA author then reviews existing technology and techniques. Polygraphing ("now used extensively in attempts to establish 'bona fides'), needs to be refined, with miniaturizing of equipment and improvements of "ruggedness"; present methods of "psychological measurements" need to be modified and refined, "e.g. utilizing a small strain gage in lieu of the cumbersome pneumatic tube, utilizing an optical or impedance type plethysmograph in place of the sphygmograph" (these were types of pulse takers); better ways of detecting emotional stress through voice harmonics or a myclograph.

Other ways of establishing identity are then reviewed: "dactylography or finger printing" is regarded as reliable but "in clandestine operations it is at times impossible to obtain finger print specimens for future reference"; "anthropometry or Bertillon's system of identification—exact physical measurements" has the disadvantage of being liable to human error.

Blood grouping is also discussed, but such groupings "can only positively exclude, but cannot positively identify." The same is alleged of specific substances in the organs, body fluids and saliva.

"Mendelian Law of inheritance and derivation of offspring," the CIA man continues with a scholarly harrumph, "holds true for group specific substances [blood, fluids etc]. On this basis then, screening and identification of displaced persons, immigrants and line crossers claiming familial relationships and direct linage [sic] can be greatly expedited."

With existing methods for positively establishing identity thus laid open to question, the CIA man arrives at "artificial means of establishing positive identification."

"1. Radio-isotopes, with predetermined half lives, [illegible] selectively implanted and/or injected.

"2. Radiologically opaque foreign bodies selectively implanted and/or injected into predetermined sites in the human body.

"3. Specific circulating antibodies artificially produced by selective antigen sensitization that are alien to the habitat in question."

Aside from the health implications, the whole scheme was mad and illogical even on its own premises. How would it be easier to implant isotopes in the agent, when earlier fingerprinting had been rejected as sometimes impossible to obtain in clandestine operations?

Radio-isotopes are used in medicine, under sophisticated constraints that can easily go awry, but the Russians could have copied the radioisotope signature in their own substitute for America's man. The idea of a "radiologically opaque" ID card lodged internally could similarly be copied. The antibody idea was more interesting, in the sense that an agent with antibodies, say from the Ozarks, would be harder to match.

But then, the CIA author, plainly entranced by his own learning and literary style—perhaps he was James Angleton, the Yale literary man—was not so much concerned with realism, as with the aesthetics of harnessing radioactive materials to the oldest conundrum in espionage—how can you be sure the messenger is the right man?

The memorandum called for "a definitive program of research," with what consequences I do not know. •

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